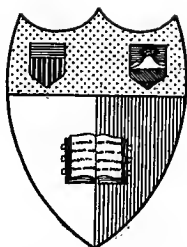


*The*  
FAITH OF PRINCES



HARVEY M. WATTS



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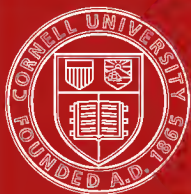
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# **THE FAITH OF PRINCES**

**. WITH A**

**SHEAF OF SONNETS**



# THE FAITH OF PRINCES

WITH A  
SHEAF OF SONNETS

By HARVEY M. WATTS



PHILADELPHIA  
THE JOHN C. WINSTON COMPANY  
MCMXV

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## TO THE WAR LORD

“*Monstrum horrendum, informe, ingens,  
cui lumen ademptum.*”—VIRGIL, AENEID,  
BOOK III.



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## IN MEMORIAM—BELGIUM!

*“Louvain, Mechlin, Ypres, the ruined cities of Belgium, may not be rebuilt, but may be left as memorials of the German Invasion.”*

LET these mute walls, lo, tell their  
tale, in stone,  
Of happy homes, now ruined, desolate!

So that all men may ponder o'er their fate  
And know the meaning of this people's  
moan,

Whose ways of thrift, with brimming  
plenty strewn,

Had conquered envy in their busy gate,  
With Brotherhood the chief concern of  
State

And peace, the guiding star of all, alone!  
O! lovely land, whose jocund bells, on high,  
For art and faith have oft rung holiday,

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IN · MEMORIAM — BELGIUM !

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The world, enanguished, rises to thy need!  
Though prostrate, balm for every wound is  
    nigh;  
Yea, from the shackles will thy sons be  
    freed;  
Vengeance is God's, He will in truth repay!

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TO FRANCE!

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TO FRANCE!

**R**OUSED from fair dreams of soft and  
silken ease,  
Gird up thy loins, slough all things  
loose and light,  
Secure thy bounds where, ruthless, as a  
blight,  
The invader, with his harsh realities,  
Pours men as sudden rush of angry seas,  
O'erwhelming all, in crude enmillioned  
might,  
Eclipsed the things of soul in sudden night,  
As nations drink of wrath the very lees!  
But lo! still beacon Chalons, where were  
stayed  
The Huns; Martel at Tours, the Paladins  
Of Charles the Great, Roland with horn and  
sword,  
And Jeanne at Rheims, erect and unafraid!  
So purge ye then of free and casual sins,  
Rise and destroy the vast barbarian horde!

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TO ITALY!

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TO ITALY!

*“La via di Roma è la migliore via; il cemento romano, è come sempre il più forte.”*  
—GABRIELE D’ANNUNZIO.

O GOLDEN land, where Tasso strung  
his lute  
And sung the shining heroes in  
Crusade,  
Where Petrarch’s dalliances still pervade,  
And Dante’s spirit triumphs o’er the brute  
In man and nature, Italy, refute  
Those tongues that rail! O, let the flashing  
blade  
Avenge thine honor, shun the poisoned  
shade,  
Nor in world counsels let thy voice be  
mute!  
Dowered with beauty, ’neath the azure  
skies,  
Proud mistress of the middle seas and land,

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TO ITALY!

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Served by thy sons, Flamens of liberty,  
Seek ye the path where fateful duty lies,  
Wearing the helm of Rome, speak and  
    command,  
In this new hour, thy crowning destiny!

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TO ENGLAND!

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TO ENGLAND!

**L**AND of full-charted rights, whose  
greater sons  
Have spread o'er earth due order and  
the law  
Of rule in reason, not of fang or claw,  
Nor brute on high as one man's whimsy  
runs,  
What is this newer doctrine, lo, that stuns,  
Turning to ages when men, hostile, saw  
Nothing in compacts but the easy flaw,  
And "writ in water," in the face of guns?  
O England, as this horror threatens all,—  
This menace with its creed of curling lip  
O'er sacred bonds, as nobler states agree,—  
Thy glorious past, with tributes, we recall,  
Debtors indeed to thy great guardianship,  
For they that "keep the faith" make all  
men free!

BEFORE CONSTANTINOPLE

**A**ND still the cry comes from the Asian  
vales,

A cry long pent, freighted with  
woe of years

Of cruelty enthroned; where, 'spite the  
tears,

Grim massacre still reddens all the trails,  
And justice mocks with useless weighted  
scales.

But hark! the murmur of hoarse panic fears  
And sounds portentous, as the South wind  
veers.

And, as the sullen roar of gun outrales,  
There sweeps, in majesty, to sudden flood,  
Vengeance delayed! Across the watery lea,  
Nations in compact, freed from petty dross,  
Ask full requite, as all, in vision, see  
The baleful Crescent, dipt in sunset blood,  
Sinking before the splendor of the Cross!

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TO GERMANY!

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TO GERMANY!

I

'TIS not alone the sober reign of law  
That sinks to silence. silence of the  
tombs,

As fierce Bellona's murky torch illumes  
The nations, and the sable curtains draw  
O'er hideous scenes; humanity in raw  
Mad for the tribute, in the gathering  
glooms,

At Moloch's shrine, whose fiery breath con-  
sumes

All things loved best, in huge insatiate maw!

Why shriek ye, then, on street, the furious  
will

Of despot kings? why boast of battled  
might,

Greeting War's chariot with exultant breath?  
Through flames attend, as ministers of ill,  
'Tis not the Car of Progress, Car of Light,  
O, blind! but lo the Juggernaut of Death!

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TO GERMANY!

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II

Indeed for long the world, with eyes aflame,  
Had yearned that men in making, loosed  
    from strife,  
Under more halcyon skies, with freedom  
    rife,  
Might find for kindred arts more glorious  
    name;  
Worthy of letters the undying fame  
Of peaceful ways: But lo, the shriek of fife,  
The war-drum's rattle, and the knife to  
    knife,  
And hopes of years die in the wild acclaim!  
Prone all that work achieved within this  
    moil;  
And those who braved life's ever roughening  
    steep,  
Are one with Prince and Peasant 'neath the  
    sod.  
What bitter end for sacrificing toil,  
What ruin in this universal sweep;  
The melting pot of Satan, not of God!

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THE LUSITANIA

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THE LUSITANIA

*“Women and children first!”*

WHO loosed this terror of the hidden  
deep,

Dastards that strike where none  
have raised a hand?

Whose was the word that gave the foul  
command,

The heart that knows no pity, but would  
sweep

All, all before as refuse, and would steep  
All souls in hatred through the servile land?  
Enthroning craft, all things of honor  
banned,

Whose is the sowing where but Death may  
reap?

Monster! who wars on helpless innocence,  
Blind and insensate is thy lust for power,  
Already have the Fates set out thy name!

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THE LUSITANIA

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Add to thy laurels, shrink from no offense,  
Let all the flags proclaim thy hectic hour;  
Aye, share with Herod his appointed  
shame!



## **THE FAITH OF PRINCES**



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THE FAITH OF PRINCES

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*Put not your trust in Princes!*

—*Psalm CXLVI, 3.*

— o —

*“Therefore a prince, so long as he keeps the subject united and loyal, ought not to mind the reproach of cruelty.*

\* \* \* \* \*

*“Nevertheless our experience has been that those princes who have done great things have held good faith of little account, and have known how to circumvent the intellect of men by craft and in the end have overcome those who have relied on their word.*

\* \* \* \* \*

*“Thereupon he promoted Ramiro d’Orco, a swift and cruel man, to whom he gave the fullest power. And because he knew that the past severity had caused some hatred against himself, so, to clear himself in the minds of the people and gain them entirely to himself,*

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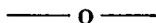
## THE FAITH OF PRINCES

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*he desired to show that if any cruelty had been practised it had not originated with him, but in the natural sternness of the minister. Under this pretense he took Ramiro, and one morning caused him to be executed and left on the piazza at Cesena with a block and a bloody knife at his side. The barbarity of this spectacle caused the people at once to be satisfied and dismayed."*

*From "The Prince," By Niccolo Machiavelli.*



*"Finally the relations between two States must often be termed a latent war. Such a position justifies the employment of HOSTILE METHODS, CUNNING AND DECEPTION, JUST AS WAR ITSELF DOES."*

*From "Germany and the Next War," Page 49, Chapter 2, "The Duty to Make War." By General Friedrich Von Bernhardi.*

PROLOGUE

(In Maniera Inglese Settecento)

*STROPHE*

“**T**HE Faith of Princes!” What is  
that you say,  
When faith is broken by them  
every day?

Words rise to lips but to conceal the thought,  
And sacred promises are counted naught:  
The while their Armies loot and burn and  
kill,

And millions serve to do their evil will.—  
“The Faith of Princes!” As the cup it  
quaffs

In bitterness, the world, despairing, laughs!

*ANTISTROPHE*

“**T**HE Faith of Princes!” You shall  
see its past;

Well, as it was, it still is to the last.  
What Borgia did and Machiavell approved,

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THE FAITH OF PRINCES

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The habit, custom, all so smoothy grooved,  
That Hapsburg-Hohenzollern but repeat  
What Guelph and Ghibelline considered  
neat;

And treachery, as order of the day,  
Still keeps in statecraft its appointed way!

## THE FAITH OF PRINCES

*(An Apologue for the times, being the soliloquy of the Duke of Urbino, Cesare Borgia, on the eve of ordering the execution of his creature, Ramiro d'Orco, at Cesena, and being, also, a gloss, for this year of grace 1915, on "The Prince," by Niccolo Machiavelli.)*

*Scene: The main apartment of the palazzo, in Cesena, looking south on the piazzetta, which is flooded with moonlight, with the Duomo on the right. Borgia is at the window looking out on the square. In the apartment a tall candle flares in the breeze and gives a fitful light. Time: Midnight.*

THE moon is south, just at meridian,  
The watchman's shadow trails a  
gibbet length  
As alley-ward he slinks; the town's asleep,  
Though I am here, they cannot always ward

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THE FAITH OF PRINCES

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And nature takes its toll as I, as I  
In civil life, in palaces, at large,  
Where men in arms kill as it pleases me.  
Would that my enemies were, eke, so still  
And that the stillness, as from poison  
draught,  
Kept on, and, lo, their night were without  
end!  
To him who wished Rome had a single  
neck,  
Which he could sever with an even stroke,  
I give the hand; then mastery were mine  
Where rebels, many-headed, flout my will.  
Or, that, like Nero, in a scuttled ship,  
I would I might drown all, women and  
men,  
And rid myself with ease of those opposed!  
But here Cesena at my nod seems true,  
Though, since the murmurs rise in sullen  
tide,  
I fain must hold them with a sacrifice,  
And grant a favor to compel a fear!  
No loss to me; Ramiro is the man.

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THE FAITH OF PRINCES

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I'll let his death set out my policy,  
So they who run may read his testament,  
No better text than sudden death, I'm sure,  
To teach the vulgar what their proper place.  
In media vita—mors! That strikes the  
heart

And pales the froward who foresee their end!  
If I were learned in words, like Cicero,  
My "De Terrore" would affright the ear;  
Like El Cid's name stampede with horror  
all!

\* \* \* \* \*

**A**ND what my policy? 'Tis simply writ;  
Force, fraud and guile, an equal  
trinity,—

Yet ever fair the seeming of my words,  
My liturgy, humility and peace  
With credo breathing ever noble things.  
Sweet discant for my hidden plots of war;  
As, in the Mass, the Kyrie sounds aloud  
In counterpoint to tune of ribald song:  
The words are holy but the burden vile,  
A fashion out of France as suits their way,

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THE FAITH OF PRINCES

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Perfected by the Flemish choristers,  
Till one is wise who knows aught what is  
    sung.

Yea, I am Janus-like, two things at once,  
My kind intent a silken glove that hides  
A hand that crushes in its grasp of steel;  
A smile, my mask, that keeps the auditors,  
The while I grit in rage behind its screen;  
As one who springs the trap, with gate well  
    locked,

On guest within for whom the farce was  
    played

Of ready welcome 'neath the barbican,  
And gracious leads him to preparèd doom.

\*                   \*                   \*                   \*                   \*

**R**OMAGNA is against me! Snarl, ye  
    curs,

Who licked my hands and groveled  
    at my feet

And begged the crumbs from off my ample  
    board!

Crumbs that in proper mixtures have  
    dispatched

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THE FAITH OF PRINCES

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Their craven souls to far Avernian shores!  
I, still the master of my life and fate,  
Will rid myself of all the bonds that clog.  
Whate'er the whine of blood, or cry of kin,  
Above the common rule I wreak my wrath;  
None stand in Borgia's way, no more than  
Jove's.

If brother pleaded with me but in vain  
What of Ramiro? Shall I halt my hand  
And let the jackal sneak across my path?  
Is Borgia weakling that he dare not glut  
His vengeance when it serves the cause of  
state?

I'll have his life at dawn; the dead say  
naught;

If otherwise, a Pentecost, my life,  
Free "gift of tongues," wagging in bitter tale,  
A screaming Babel that would never cease.

\* \* \* \* \*

**B**UT we who walk above the common  
plane

Find plenary excuse for what we will.  
With me 'tis "in excelsis," am I not

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THE FAITH OF PRINCES

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Of Rome, escutcheons be devised as may,  
Once Cardinal and son to him who stands  
Vice-gerent of the Throne of Heaven,  
serene!

Thus cousin german to our Lord on High,  
And in this cousinship, myself and God,  
Find all that justifies my ways with  
men.

Aye, ego Dominusque, phrase most apt,  
Fit for the Gonfalonière, that I am.

This antic thought just suits my twisted  
mood,

A seal for Borgia in unique design,  
His apotheosis in Roman style,  
The human bulking large as the divine,  
As when Mantegna paints Our Patroness,  
Our Lady, with the donors equal size,  
Who crowd her with the saints on either  
side;

So I, with God, my powers delegate,  
Decree my will as fiat from above,  
My right divine in great and lesser things.  
Ha, ha! the fantasy, as moonlight streams

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THE FAITH OF PRINCES

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In weird half-lights within the room,  
          transports!

The thing is well invent, I'll bruit it forth  
That Borgia walks with God on battlefield  
As well as when he served within the rail.  
Myself am then supreme, my will the law,  
No mentor stirs remorse, nor curses move,  
So ego Dominusque let it be,

Interpreter of Heaven as well as Hell  
Whose seven circles groan with those I've  
          sent,

Throat-slit to serve its ghastly rims and  
          Dis.

I judge the quick, leave to Our Lord the  
          dead;

A slight division in the partnership,  
In matters earthy giving me the gauge,  
With victories just as my chaplain prays.  
For if one spare the loathsome brood of hate,  
They turn and trip just as the road seems  
          safe,

Confound your counsels. No, be merciless,  
And crush your enemies beneath your feet,

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THE FAITH OF PRINCES

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Scrape tablets to the grain for new design.  
The merciful but builds a bulwark, huge,  
To house the enemy and feed his pride.  
The wholesome fear of rulers, that I seek,  
Secured, it equalizes small and great.  
Strike down, and keep on striking, that's  
my rule!

\* \* \* \* \*

NO, no, my method's sound, infallible,  
My ex-cathedra judgment never errs.  
The Sforzas know what is my guiding star,  
My compass o'er the troubled sea of power,  
Bologna feels my lash, Ravenna kneels  
And Sinigaglia sees the harvesting,  
O'er-ripe her heads and heavy, but they fall.  
And I have made their fields and towns a  
waste,  
As tributes to a Borgia's dream of peace,  
Which finds sweet incense as the cities  
smoke!  
No half-way measures, leaving open sores;  
No, cauterized and calcinate they lie  
Open to new endeavors at my wish,

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THE FAITH OF PRINCES

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Life at my bidding, creatures of my hand!  
If ruins crowd my steps, I'll build anew  
And raise e'en fairer structures in their  
place.

As in the body, so, in public things,  
Blood letting purifies the humors pent,  
The sluggish, thickened ichors that obstruct.  
So let it flow, this is my remedy,  
In proper channels and your rule is sure;  
A fair specific that great captains know,  
A primal law of statecraft from the first.  
I know each movement in this game of  
blood,

None have surpassed me in the open dare,  
Where I risk all upon the single throw.  
And so I keep my sword all free from rust  
By constant usage seeking my desire,  
And let it parley in the protocols.—  
The faith of princes! it looks well in peace  
But in the grind of war wears somewhat thin  
And turns to common dust as do we all.  
But I, per Corpo, am its servitor  
When serving yields results; the master, I,

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THE FAITH OF PRINCES

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When double dealing needs the firmer grip.  
Though black and grisly, hidden in the  
dark,

Lo, whatsoe'er the deed, my port is fair,  
E'er fair in public every move and mien.  
The verb dissimulate I know by heart,  
Its moods and tenses are my counsellors.  
Plot evil but let cloying honey drip  
In cunning from your lips, for words are  
cheap,

And smiles mere surface wrinkles of the  
skin;

My practice, ever as the circumstance,  
And circumstance as I, alone, may fix  
With plot and counterplot and constant  
fraud,

The fox brain with the lion's heart my cue.  
\* \* \* \* \*

**B**UT why do I run o'er these things in  
mind?

Ramiro's fate I am determined on,  
But, ah! he speaks of promises, my word,  
My guarantees set out by scrivener,

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THE FAITH OF PRINCES

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My oath, my bond; all naught, the thing is  
    clear,  
He falls, or I face sullen discontent.  
Before my safety what are all these vows?  
Is this my first essay in broken faith?  
Why, in my 'teens as whilom priest I  
    thrived  
On shattered pledges, raised myself in  
    power  
Upon the sherds of those who aimed at  
    state.  
And why should I then in this broader  
    sphere  
Play white when all my compeers stalk in  
    black,  
Birds of one color and of one intent?  
Of course they'll prattle with Ramiro gone  
As those at Forli and Urbino, too.  
They'll cry against me, scream of treaties  
    'nulled,  
The violation of the spoken word,  
Disloyalty to written things, the fools!  
Whose partisans lie close in battle trench,

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THE FAITH OF PRINCES

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Unlovely corses all so neatly slain,  
And yet I would 'twere easier, this game;  
The after toils of battles irk me sore.  
I would I warred in Flanders; like a board  
The land, all flat, reticulate with roads,  
Your progress easy if the people will,  
But if resistance comes, the devil's loose,  
For even haughty Burgundy recoils  
Before the Belgae, feared of Rome of old,  
And Hapsburg finds no comfort in his  
fief.

And yet there's much to give you recom-  
pense,

For in the loamy soil, all water-soaked,  
Graves make themselves, no flinty rocks to  
break,

As in these stony wastes of Tuscany,  
Where nature fights as if in duty bound  
To save her sons within their eyries hid.  
Yet I have dashed them from the battle-  
ments

Have hurled them o'er the bastions raised on  
high,

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THE FAITH OF PRINCES

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And let them bleach upon the sunburnt  
ramps.

For what are oaths when Fortune threatens  
death,

And Mars, defeat, upon a stricken field?  
And might makes right, since Michael with  
his hosts

From out the gates of Heaven drave Lu-  
cifer,

And sent him hurtling to the nether deeps!

\* \* \* \* \*

**I** WOULD that Caesar, of the Julian gens,  
Had let his cloak, Elijah-like, alight  
Upon my shoulders; that his heritage  
Of spirit and of valor were mine own;  
I'd celebrate a holiday in field,  
Fire all the brassy culverins at once  
And make a battue of the enemy,—  
But Caesar's not upon the calendar,  
His miracles of captainship are naught,  
Nor make for saintship in St. Peter's nave—  
But in mine eyes his head is halo-crowned.  
I hold, with him, no argument in war,

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THE FAITH OF PRINCES

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Let words like laws be silent as arms clash  
And swiftest action do its perfect work!  
His "Veni, vidi, vici" sets the pace,  
Aye, would our common tongue were so  
compressed;

His way's the only way for men of force,  
Yourself your Fate, and, likewise, Destiny,  
These are the rules of war I understand,  
And not o'er fair my application sure,  
With breach and strict observance as is fit,  
The rules that spell one word, 'tis "victory."  
The art of war's a trade, an industry,  
Which, God my Judge, few ply so well as I.  
As for the artifice 'tis passing old;  
Like Cadmus, sow the dragon teeth of  
strife

Of race, religion, then await your chance;  
For 'tis not all a thing of blood and iron,  
So many bodies and equipments bought  
From hired bullies coming from afar;  
No, no, give me rallying cause and, lo,  
Dull hearts inflame, dull eyes suffuse with  
wrath,

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THE FAITH OF PRINCES

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As Guelph and Ghibelline they fly to arms  
And cut each other's throats with equal ease,  
Just "ad majorem Dei gloriam,"

And, for the pleasure of the reigning prince!  
Fools, fools! And so my levies do my will,  
The heavier battalions sweep the field,  
My larger cannon win the smiles of Heaven;  
Or, else, the weak, with itching palm, I buy  
And win the battle ere it comes to pass.

For all things yield at once to yellow gold,  
Like Jericho, the city walls collapse  
And gates spring open at its magic touch,  
The warder hands the keys of untouched  
keep;

If otherwise, I starve them to the end,  
Their stubbornness but serves my purposes,  
And, Victor, find a charnel house my prize,  
But that 'tis mine stirs to the very soul.

\* \* \* \* \*

THEY'D talk of faith of princes with  
me, well!

I'll face them though it makes for instant  
mirth.

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THE FAITH OF PRINCES

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For what are words indeed! mere breath  
    of air,  
That's sweet or foul as comes by birth or  
    health,  
No more; all trifles, thistledown in weight  
Against the needs of empire and my will.  
And so Ramiro cries in vain to me,  
My ears are clogged! Alive he's in my way,  
My place within the sun of sure success.  
Yet 'tis not I, but dire necessity—  
For are we not the playthings of grim fate—  
That crushes to the dust, and yet he talks  
Of parchments, papers, merest tags and rags!  
What's parchment but the beaten skin of  
    sheep?  
And what's the quill but pinion of a goose?  
And what is ink but gall and tincture? Bah!  
And what the combination? Written  
    words!  
As for the scribblings, they are waste and  
    vain,  
Mere hieroglyphics scratched upon a reed;  
Two meanings to each text as clerks dispute,

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THE FAITH OF PRINCES

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Two views secured at cost of lawyer's fee.  
Well, place them in the balance with my  
sword

And which is heavier as the scale descends?  
'Tis infant babble this of promises!  
Expediency my only norm, what else  
Can princes do? The means I make and  
mould

And shape them to their full finality.  
This is the test, what's mediate is naught  
But as it yields results; the end, the end!  
For me, one end, dominion over all,  
My place, then, in the sun and at my ease,  
Romagna's master and then—Italy!  
The past is gone, I'll let its poison soak  
And in some sour Epistle tell its tale.  
My Gospel?—well! 'tis not a duplicate  
Of that the shepherds heard, but manners  
change

And we change with them; each one to his  
trade!

They'll know the facts, when my Te Deum's  
sung

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THE FAITH OF PRINCES

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And Jubilate sounds for cities ta'en,  
As Nunc Dimittis came to Capua  
All calculate to very nicety,  
Quick Benedictus for unshriven souls  
Who found too soon, for them, the ready  
pall!

A Missa sicca, dry as dust, I'll serve  
And for good measure, add a Requiem.  
Of course, "In Terra Pax," but on my terms,  
Let God get his accounts as best He can!  
I gather mine with every flashing blade.—  
"Hominibus bonae volunt,"—that's the cry;  
But whose "good-will" I never leave to  
chance.

And, as for perfect peace, there's Tacitus  
Who lays the proper maxim for us all;  
"Qui solitudinem et faciunt  
Appellant pacem;" that's the surest way;  
Make peace that's lasting, for one starts  
afresh  
Where dead ne'er carry tales, nor fight  
again!

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THE FAITH OF PRINCES

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**I** MUST not see Ramiro, he would plead  
Holding my knees for respite e'er so  
brief,

For thus men cling to life down to its dregs,  
E'en if it slobbers to a senile close,  
And for it sacrifice their very all.

I am not more than men in this, nor hold  
Myself above their instincts animal,  
But I must check my feelings lest I fall.

Nor will I harken if his women cry  
"Have mercy on our house and save our  
Lord."

The jades! Lucrezia sums them up for me  
In witty narrative of things at court.

I like her quips, she spares none in her jests  
And knows their every wile and artifice,  
And, of necessity, if she would lead

And hold her own where feline manners  
rule.

Yea, stripped or clothed, in mind or body  
bare,

They play their part before my searching  
eyes—

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THE FAITH OF PRINCES

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The lure of flesh?—that's for the soldier  
crew

Who stay their rapine for a well-turned arm,  
No loose impedimenta in my camp  
For me! I know when dalliance destroys,  
And what one pays for smirks or welling  
tears,

Or shrill abuse, the privilege of their sex,  
The chiefest weapon in their battery,  
Where weakness serves as easy citadel,  
All "honest women and from Corinth too,"  
As one would say with Aristophanes!  
Who win their praise, win little else I wot;  
Who hold their love, will hold no treasure  
long,

'Tis, "odium figulinum" with them all;  
"Trade jealousy," the motive that controls.  
St. Paul's monition I would e'er apply  
In private and in public as in church,  
And keep the Salic law as daily rule.  
But give them freedom in the couching  
room.

For war needs cradles quite as well as guns!

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THE FAITH OF PRINCES

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As for their interference, bah, 'tis naught,  
I'll clap a plaster on their screaming  
mouths—

A cincture, not of chastity—but—wait!

\* \* \* \* \*

I'LL have my will, Cesena must be heard.  
The people plot, who were my sole  
support

And helped my fortunes, 'gainst my creature  
here.

The man is cruel! I must seem more kind;  
The man is bestial; I must be the prince;  
He, avaricious; I must spendthrift be!

For all his fawning favors he must die!

Or else that he is I and I am he

Will worm in easy logic through the mob  
And on my hands will be his stigmata.

His crime spills o'er and spatters me aloof,  
The people pierce the thin disguise that  
cloaks.

In stewardship my policy of hate,

And I am suspect through his fealty.

Perchance in cups the fool has babbled, too,

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THE FAITH OF PRINCES

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"I do this not by nature, but, my friends,  
As Borgia orders from his castle keep."

And so I meet with looks avert and dour  
And catch the fingers crossed against my  
glance.

This must not be! Ramiro's day is done,  
The "evening and the morning" wind it up:  
(I quote me Scripture for a trifling deed).

And since he is the creature of my whim,  
The cat's paw cannot blame a change of  
mind;

Nor weather vane find fault with any breeze,  
For those who act as procurators know  
Th' attainder's on their heads with no  
escape,

They serve me at their peril, well or ill!

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*(Looks out on the square, studying the  
Cathedral and its architectural details.)*

I N this soft light the door seems rather  
fine,

A hint of Donatello in the Christ,

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THE FAITH OF PRINCES

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The dome would almost pass for Florentine.  
I owe a chapel and an altarpiece.  
I'll have Bramante try his New World gold  
As in Maria Maggiore's coffered vault,  
And ask Buonarroti for his help  
In something fine, a Pieta in small;  
A devotee, as I, of things antique,  
His style quite lately fooled the cardinal;  
Not me; I know the 'prentice hand in art,  
Though when 'tis Rafaello's, well, beware!  
I would his master Perugino came,  
Or, better, Pinturicchio, who serves  
The Pope, and well at that, in Vatican,  
Where walls, once bare, now glow in magery  
And fields in flower and ways of men, set out,  
Tell pleasant histories through Mistress Art.  
As does Lucrezia I would worship, too,  
Before the shrine of beauty and of love,  
But all these chamber manners murder  
time,  
And now my tasks compel to other ways.  
Enough! my orders—lest the man escape;  
The very walls do carry news of me!

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THE FAITH OF PRINCES

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At once! at once!

*(Claps his hands and calls his secretaries.)*

The captain and the guard!

*(The captain enters with the palace guard.)*

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MY captain! nearer to the arras, so;  
I speak in underbreath, the matter  
grave,

'Tween me and thee these prefaces must  
lie

A subject privy. Know ye then my will.

Ramiro, he my agent here must die.

Profaner of my counsels, he exceeds

His due authority and has served me ill.

The people groan beneath his yoke and I,

Well, I, as saviour, hasten to relieve,

Once more in seeming prove their patron  
saint.—

He is to die at dawn. Not secretly,

But as a fresh exemplar of my rule;

In raising hopes I would not quell their  
fears,

And by his course would indicate my mind.

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THE FAITH OF PRINCES

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As sharp a hint as oft at Lenten tide  
His grace, my fief, bawls out from yonder  
porch.

Down there, before the steps, where roads  
cut o'er

The piazzetta, set the headsman's block,  
Then fetch Ramiro loaded well with chains,  
Gyves at the wrist and ankles cutting flesh,  
And all a-tremble from the rack whose twist  
Should make him eloquent and babbler, bah,  
Behead him! sharp the stroke at flush of  
dawn,

Then let the town, astir to catch the news,  
Come tumbling through its narrow lanes to  
church

And sight the spectacle. The corse exposed,  
The head on stake, set firmly in the pave,  
And block and dripping sword in ruddy  
pool.

For I would have them whisper "Who is  
next?"

Beseems that none is mightier than the  
Duke."

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THE FAITH OF PRINCES

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Would have them know that Borgia rules,  
alone!

Let them to Mass and shrive themselves  
at once!

Vengeance is mine, I shall repay on earth,  
So render unto Caesar all his dues,  
Since judgment notes from Heaven may be  
delayed,

With God I'll sit more firmly here. Obey!

*(The captain and the guard retire. Borgia looks once more out on the square, and, smiling sardonically, blows out the candle, and turns to his cabinet.)*

ZEUGMA

And so it came to pass: Cesena saw  
And all the world has gazed in horror since,  
And set the Borgia on a pedestal  
Of deepest obloquy, shame black as night,  
Nor lets the scrivener escape his fate,  
Himself involved as bye-word for all ill,  
A hissing on the lips of history!

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EPILOGUE

*STROPHE*

“**T**HE Faith of Princes!” Why not  
utter rout  
For such a system as the facts set  
out?

Why prate to-day of rights of kings, divine,  
When kaisers yield advantage to the swine,  
And epileptics claim by right of birth  
Full homage, where the proper thing is  
mirth

For those whose acts savor of ways insane,  
The while they rule as despots, free of  
rein?

*ANTISTROPHE*

“**T**HE Faith of Princes!” To the  
limbo then  
Of useless lumber, in an age of  
men,  
With all that flunkyism with its bays

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THE FAITH OF PRINCES

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Would still exact with honeyed overpraise!  
Away with kingcraft, which, to sound  
    attack,  
With lese majeste would answer back!  
Supplant the “Faith of Princes”— hellish  
    joke!—  
With “faith of peoples” freed from every  
    yoke!











